English as an International Language: The debate continues

Peter W. Roux

Abstract

English is today considered the global lingua franca. It dominates in spheres of international business, technology, science and academia. In political circles, where global economic competitiveness continues to demand the scrutiny of countries' internal educational policy, English has become a formidable 'gatekeeper' (Pennycook, 2008), with the fortunes of individuals and countries at stake. Supporters of English as an International Language (EIL) claim that the language is 'neutral', pointing out its universal international utility. Opposing viewpoints maintain that the continued proliferation of the language is endangering the other languages spoken in the world, increases economic division, and in fact continues to serve mainly western interests through education systems that have seen little change in their language policies since colonial times (Phillipson, 2001). Using a brief sociolinguistic history of the Afrikaans language as a point of departure, this paper highlights and addresses some of the issues that have come to characterize the debate of EIL. The functions of language in society, and specifically its role in the formation and maintenance of knowledge and ideology is critically discussed, drawing partially on South African history, as well as a number of other examples. The paper concludes with a critical analysis of the role of EIL, which, it is argued, cannot necessarily be seen as completely neutral, nor entirely free from the ideological forces in society.

Key terms: Afrikaans, English, EIL, sociolinguistics, critical theory, language and power

"The word does not die like a man… With it, the universe crumbles" - Edmond Jabes[1]

1. Introduction

There seems little doubt today that the English language has become the most widely used and indeed dominant language for international business, technology, science and academia. Based on information provided by the British Council (2014)[2], it is estimated that the speakers of English as a second language likely outnumber those speaking it as a first language, that over two-thirds of the world's scientists read in English, that more than 700,000 people go to learn English in the UK each year, and that the direct economic benefits to the British economy in relation to this desire for English education possibly exceeds one billion pounds per year (see Appendix 1 for a more comprehensive summary). The presence of English as a subject, or, at the very least, as a form of instruction in educational institutions across the globe is today virtually unquestioned, and it continues to attract and receive political attention as countries seek to balance the formulation of their language policies with the requirements and challenges of the global market.

Although the political interest in language policy is nothing new, recent years have seen the increasing convergence of global markets, placing demands on the languages required in the ensuing trade between countries. Languages are, as Jordão (2009, p. 95) observes, 'important elements of human development, crucial for information flows and the financial market in the contemporary world'. Can it therefore be said that language has acquired 'a high exchange value in the international labor market' (Rassool, 1999, p. 250)? A brief glance at the data provided by the British Council (Appendix 1) appears to indicate that this might indeed be the case with English: that this language now has a global 'value' or 'power' that exceeds the value (monetary or otherwise) or power of other languages in the world.

[1] In: Breytenbach, B. (2009). Notes from the Middle World.

[2] The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Their website can be found here: http://www.britishcouncil.org

Yet, one needs to remember that languages themselves do not have inherent power, but rather achieve this status through their use by powerful ideological interests operating in society. As Fairclough (2001, p. 2) points out: '… the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language'. Although this statement highlights the ideological nature of language, Fairclough (2001) goes on to explain that it is not *only* that language has arguably become the primary medium of social control and power; in fact, it is the social implications that flow from this state of affairs that are of concern: language contributes to the domination of some people by others. Thus, if we are to accept that English is the global language, there should also be a consideration made for the possibility that 'the use of English serves the interests of some much better than others' (Phillipson, 2001, p. 188). In light of these observations it seems pertinent to critically consider the role of English as an international language (EIL) – its historical rise as a globally used language, its role in education systems across the world, and in particular, how it might contribute to the exertion of power in societies (Asian, African) where it is a newcomer, relative to the local tongues, yet is widely used or has become established as an official language.

This paper is therefore interested in the rise of English as an EIL, but also seeks to understand the role of language, in general, in the formation and maintenance of society and culture. To achieve this, I first provide a relatively short historical description and analysis of the development of the Afrikaans language in South Africa, with specific reference to political and economic factors. This historical backdrop serves a dual purpose: first, it provides an example of the important role that language (Afrikaans in this case) fulfills in the formation and development of society. Secondly, it provides some insight into coercive government tactics, i.e. the power dynamics that underlie the goals of language policy, of which the Anglicization of South Africa in the early 1800's is an outstanding example[3]. Drawing on this historical background, this paper then continues to critically discuss some of the issues that have come to characterize the debate on the role of EIL, and specifically on the one hand, its alleged 'imperialistic' or 'hegemonic' role (Dendrinos, 2008; Phillipson, 1992; Tsuda, 2008); and on the other, its so-called 'neutral' or 'functional' role (Kachru, 1996; 1997) in the world. The paper concludes with a critical analysis of power in the role of EIL, which I will argue, goes beyond historical fact to offer a more comprehensive and constructive understanding of the issues in question.

2. Words in history: Afrikaans in South Africa

Historians trace the first recorded utterance, of what later became known as the Afrikaans language, back to 1707, when a young offender, on the charge of a public misdemeanor, and threatened with banishment, proclaimed loudly:

> … ik wil niet loopen, ik ben een Afrikaander, al slaat die landrost mijn dood, of al setten hij mijn in den tronk, ik sal nog wil niet swygen (I shall not leave, I am an Afrikaander, even if the magistrate beats me to death or puts me in jail. I shall not, nor will I be silent (Gilomiee, 2003, p. 22).

The language used in this statement resembled the 17th century Dutch of the time - yet, it was no longer the same tongue as spoken in the Netherlands. Since the formation of a small outpost by the Dutch East India Company on the southern tip of Africa in 1652, new words had entered the language: forms, pronunciation and use had set off on a developmental trajectory of their own (Giliomee, 2003, pp. 52-3). In his utterance, the young man identified himself as an 'Afrikaander' – the first official recording (Giliomee, 2003, p. 23) of a person referring to himself as what is known today as an Afrikaner: a speaker of the Afrikaans language, essentially from European descent but a native of South Africa. Not to ignore the contextual events surrounding the young offender's outburst, it could perhaps be said that insisting on a new identity, in a new language, and on his right to speak, this young man challenged not

[3] For an interesting discussion on this process of Anglicization, see Vivian Bickford-Smith's (2003) article entitled: "Revisiting Anglicization in the Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony".

only the laws of the colony at the time but insisted on his right to be treated as a citizen of the 'new country' – not to be judged by the laws of the colonizer, but rather by the laws of a nation yet to be. His (surely unwitting) pronouncement, insistent in a new tongue, became a political act.

Despite it being a distant Dutch trading post, the complexity of administration, rule and maintenance of this small society was evident from the start. The influx of a very diverse group of people, from all walks of society, and from across the world, provided a significant challenge for the Dutch East India Company. In common with other settlement societies during the colonial era, which lacked a historical antecedent of cohabitation, the stratification of the population was marked by a complex and disorganized network of tensions and divides, set for a continuous state of turmoil. The dynamics of power and political organization of the conqueror and the conquered, masters and slaves, the mix of tradesmen, farmers, skilled and unskilled laborers, administrative officers and clergymen, soon provided the Dutch colonizers with critical decisions in maintaining law and order. Although at first mainly from Dutch origin, the population very soon included immigrants from Germany, France and Britain, as well as slaves and others from Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India, Madagascar and China, as well as other parts of Africa. Giliomee (2003, p. 11) notes that the Dutch rulers, with the influx of immigrants, made sure that not only were their administration in trade and law to be laid down, but also the civil lives of the multiracial colony: as early as 1701, the Dutch Lords Seventeen instructed the Cape governor with such measures 'to ensure that the French language (would) gradually become extinct and disappear'. In due course this occurred, and by 1750 most foreign inhabitants (or 'burghers') and their offspring used Dutch, or some form of it: a simplified, restructured creole (later called Afrikaans). The German language, having even fewer speakers and communal support, suffered the same fate. The inhabitants of the colony at the time slowly developed communities across a larger area and drew their identity from three sources: their European descent (which was closely linked to the Christian faith), their burgher status, and the growth and use of a separate Dutch/Afrikaans language. The signs of a nation in its infancy were becoming more evident, with a language as a shared cultural creation on the tongues of its people.

The late 1700's saw sweeping political and social changes in Europe affect life at the Cape. First, the French Revolution shifted social and ideological power and soon after, the Dutch requested Britain to take occupation of the Cape Colony. This huge shift in 1795 swept away all the corporations, councils and organization of the Cape in favor of a British system and left a divided white population, split along interesting lines: top Cape officials as anti-revolutionary, pro-Britain, and the burghers, in general, pro-French, pro-revolution and anti-British (Giliomee, 2003, pp. 195-6). With the arrival of a significant number of British settlers in the 1820's, and the introduction of free enterprise and trade, the next century saw not only significant population growth, but also, as a result, a need for greater sophistication in the administration of law, commerce and civil society. An English newspaper, as well as one in Dutch, had been formed, and the right to freely debate politics and criticize government had been won. This served in no small measure to further the interests and development of both Afrikaans/Dutch and English speakers. However, with a clear agenda of Anglicization by the authorities, language policy soon dictated that English be the only language allowed in government and court. Giliomee (2003, pp. 193-5) observes that in addition, by the 1830's, the ideology of free trade and progress, dominant in the British Empire, had taken root, almost as a 'secular religion', and the 'commitment to free enterprise, along with a proficiency in English, were considered essential' for social progression. An incipient tension marked the British and Afrikaner relationship however, and with the larger successes of the British Empire elsewhere in the world, came an English nationalism that expressed itself in the English language, and reinforced itself through symbols of dress, emblems, architecture, food, and 'cultured' society in the life at the Cape (Giliomee, 2003, p. 196).

Afrikaner aspirations and political consciousness however, had slowly begun to awaken in reaction to the feelings of marginalization experienced, partially in reaction to the language policy and dominance of English in commerce, law and society. In a peaceful revolt, and with strong aspirations toward self-determination, later known as 'The Great Trek', a large number of burghers left the Cape colony during the late 1830's and spread out across the vast, mostly uncharted interior of Southern Africa, in

search of a separate, self-governed national identity. It eventually culminated in the formation of two small republics. As far as language use was concerned, Giliomee (2003, p. 215) notes that by 1875 some form of simplified Dutch or Afrikaans were spoken by these European descendants across most of the present South Africa – an unofficial language, yet to be formally codified. A statement by S.J. du Toit, an Afrikaner intellectual of the time, printed in a local weekly of the Cape colony, captures the nationalist debate on the language of the time: 'the language of a nation expresses the character of that nation… deprive a nation of the vehicle of its thoughts and you deprive it of the wisdom of its ancestors' (Giliomee, 2003, p. 215).

The discovery of vast mineral riches in the Afrikaner republics and the British annexation thereof from the 1870's onward, with the resultant growing resentment, resistance and political consciousness of the Afrikaner at the increased ownership and control of the economic and associated spheres by the British, finally brought a century of division to a head. The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) was the first anti-colonial war of the 20th century. After three years of resistance, and fearing complete annihilation, the Afrikaner leaders accepted an offer for a negotiated peace, partially as a result of British public outrage at the particular malice of the British imperialism. They managed to have the property of the nation restored, the prisoners repatriated and some war compensation given, as well as limited, but guaranteed language rights in law and education (Giliomee, 2009, p. 370). Although accepting defeat, the last stage of the war had won the Afrikaner resistance universal respect as freedom fighters, and had given depth, commitment and endurance to the political character of a nation and it's republican ideals. The period of time ahead, however, continued to reflect the tensions between the two dominant white groups in the country. Lord Milner, charged with the post-war management, sought to unify the four splintered colonies, laying a foundation for political union as well as the bureaucracy of governance. A renewed effort at Anglicization continued, and although already prevalent in urban centers, law and commerce, English was declared the sole official language and medium of instruction. It was the post-war, grass-roots effort of religious and social movements, driven in large numbers by the perseverance of Afrikaner women, that managed the import of limited Afrikaans instruction in schools, thereby assisting and necessitating the need for standardization, extension and elevation of the language. In a particularly vivid example of the intersect between language and politics, a teacher told the Afrikaner prime minister in 1924:

> …without the work of the Afrikaner teacher you and your people would not be in power today. Not that we teach the children party politics; we teach them their language and their history. Now they have voted for you (Giliomee, 2003, p. 379).

The next 40 years in the development of Afrikaans saw the links between nationalism, language and politics solidified: the language was officially standardized and extended for use in government and all spheres of public life. Although English remained as the other official language, Afrikaans became one of four languages in the world – among Indonesian, Hebrew and Hindi – to be standardized in the course of the 20th century, and used in all branches of life and learning, including science, commerce and technology, including being used as the sole medium of instruction in some schools and universities (Giliomee, 2003, p. xvii).

Hofmeyr (cited in Giliomee, 2003, p. xvii) refers to the establishment of the Afrikaner nation as: 'building a nation from words', a statement that encapsulates well the inseparable links between identity, language and society. The preceding discussion illustrated that these links are very much intertwined in the development of a nation, and that despite the obvious contextual differences in history, geography and cultures, there is little reason to believe that other languages would be very different in the containment and expression of national culture, values, conventions and aspirations. As the brief historical vignette shows, there is every reason to believe that some of the seminal moments in the development or expansion of a nation also draw on the inherent power in its language to convey (or enforce) desired social outcomes. For the Afrikaner, these moments were closely tied to the survival and development of a nation; for the British imperial interest at the time, language policy became a tool in furthering opportunities for territorial expansion and financial gain. Language, in this view, contains enormous power – realized through how ideology, culture and language 'co-constitute one another' (Bhatia, 2008, p. 268). The coming together of the assortment of cultures

and languages at the Cape in the 1700's, and the resultant birth of a nation should also emphasize the recognition that a nation's history is simultaneously a history of other nations, their ideologies, languages, economic, and cultural influences. While the history of the development of Afrikaans serves to throw light on how closely intertwined language might be to the birth and growth of a nation, the later clashes between English and Afrikaans stands as a stark example of how language also harbors the power to underpin, advance or defend nationalistic and other interests. This notion that language contributes to the shifts in power of any given society forms the backdrop to the rest of this paper. Drawing on the mentioned historical examples, with additional reference to more contemporary cases, the ensuing discussion continues to build on the South African experience as it explores the role of English in the world today.

3. The role of English as international language (EIL): Issues in the debate

The omnipresence of the English language has increasingly fuelled academic debate concerned with the role that it fulfills in contemporary international society. At least two viewpoints regarding its role in the world have emerged: one, its alleged 'imperialistic' or 'hegemonic' influence (Dendrinos, 2008; Tsuda, 2008; Phillipson, 1992); and the other, its so-called 'neutral' or 'functional' capacity (Kachru, 1997; 1996). Regardless of the position one takes in the debate, calls for a more comprehensive and critical appreciation of the presence of English in contemporary culture have been numerous and insistent (Pennycook, 2008; Dendrinos et al., 2008; Tsuda, 2008; Phillipson, 2001). The subsequent analysis will therefore present these two positions in relation to the debate on EIL as it attempts to explain some of the reasons for the rapid spread and diffusion, institutionalization and pervasive use of this language in so many spheres of the current global society.

3.1 The spread of English: From imperialism to functionalism

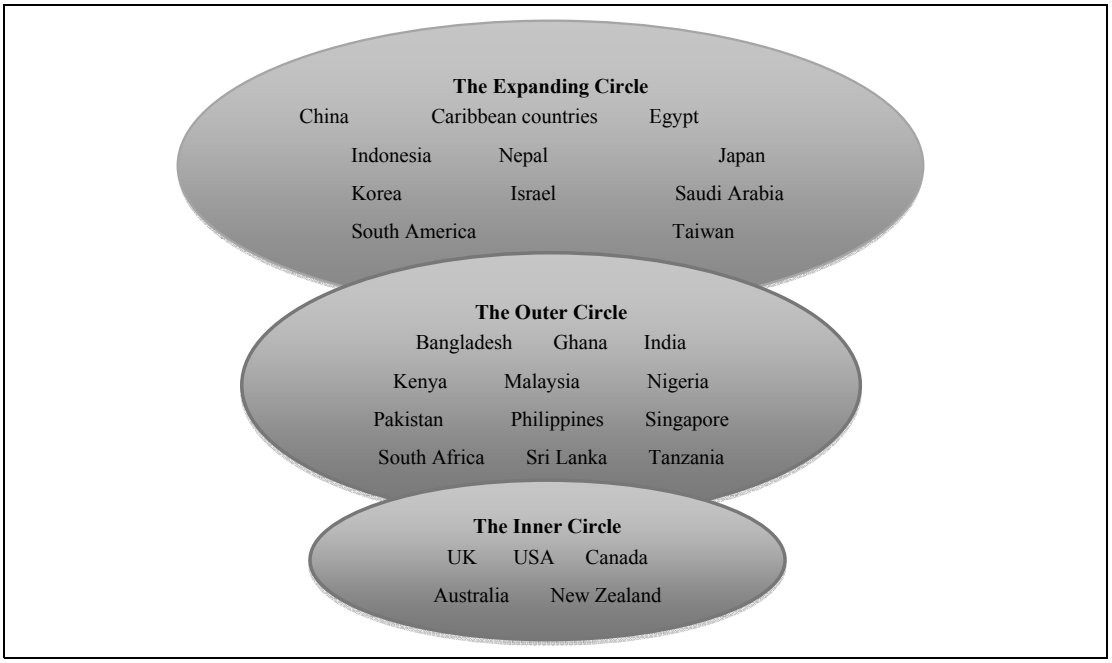
Bhatt (2001:529) remarks that the spread of English in the world is popularly viewed in terms of two diasporas, the first being the large-scale migration of native speakers during the age of colonial expansion to North-America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the second being the declaration of English as an official language in many countries. As Kachru's (1996) concentric circle model (Figure 1 below) indicates, countries that are considered the traditional bases for the spread of English are referred to as 'inner circle' countries. Kachru (1996) explains that countries in the 'outer circle' of expansion adopted or incorporated English as an official language *mainly* through historical and developmental necessity. This point is well illustrated by the South African example: the process of eventual incorporation of English as an official language came about over the course of at least a century's historical developments. Although English was, as Gilliomee, (2003) points out, first introduced and promoted to support British colonial expansion in trade and commerce, it soon assumed a political role with the rise of British nationalism, which saw the coercive policies of Anglicization enforced through the power of the British state.

The South African experience thus exemplifies Kachru's (1996) contention, namely that state-sanctioned and enforced language policies are also evident in the histories of 'outer circle countries', where they have often accompanied developments in trade, commerce, education and law. Accordingly, as Kachru (1996) explains, the link to linguistic imperialism is made through what is at first an asymmetric linguistic relationship between natives and non-natives, and later becomes enforced in the apparatus and functions of the state. Such developments in a society set in motion a process of absorption, which is eventually 'internalized as natural, normative and essential' (Bhatt, 2001, p. 532) by the native inhabitants, who are the later producers and consumers of the language. Writers such as Tsuda (2008, p. 48) consider this process of adoption the 'naturalness' of English as an outflow of English language hegemony: 'as if there were no alternatives but to accept the dominance of English'. Considering the South African example again, Ross (cited by Bickford-Smith, 2003, p. 85) suggests that:

> …British hegemony has been so little studied because the English have been so successful in imposing it on South African society. They (*the inhabitants of the Cape in the early 1800's – my italics)* themselves, those who have assimilated to the English and those who have reacted against it, have all taken it for granted, have assumed that it is part of the natural order of things that English ways are the best.

In another, very graphic observation from the same continent, Kenyan novelist, N'gugi wa Thiong'o (cited by Pennycook, in Burns and Coffin, 2001, p. 81) links the value of the English language, education and individual commercial advancement in colonial Kenya: 'Thus, the most coveted place … in the system was only available to holders of an English-language credit card. English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom'. In view of the cited examples within the larger history and practice of British colonialism, it is hard not to seriously consider Tsuda's (2008) observation regarding the 'natural' element in the current pervasiveness of English across the world. Whether so-called 'English hegemony' exists or not, observations such as these remain important to critically consider, especially given the academic and economic requirements that the language demands from its non-native speakers.

Figure 1: The spread of English: The concentric circle model (Kachru, 1996, p. 137).



Taking the effects of English hegemony a little further, Skutnabb-Kangas suggests the use of the term 'linguicism', which is defined as: 'ideologies and structures where language is the means for effecting or maintaining an unequal allocation of power and resources' (cited in Tsuda, 2008, p. 50). This definition appears to apply well to the colonialist era and the subsequent, institutionalization of English as an official language in many of the outer circle countries. Two recent studies provide further evidence that linguistic imperialism retains a strong hold in global life. Choi's (2003) critical analysis of Hong Kong's educational policies post-1997, for instance, provides evidence that the language policies of the island were 'engineered by the business elite' right before the changeover to ensure a continuation of wealthy business interests, and that this helped to 'perpetuate a form of linguistic imperialism' (Choi, 2003, p. 673).

In a similar vein, Narkunas (2005) analysis of Vietnam's transition from a planned to a market economy draws attention to the World Bank's carefully orchestrated educational investment in that country. He highlights, for instance, that many foreign languages have been imposed on Vietnam in the past, but that today English has emerged as the dominant business language in East Asia, and that graduates with some proficiency in the language earn more than others. The implication, as he explains, is that individuals can expect a 'return of between five and eight percent' on their lifetime earnings following an 'investment' in English language training (Narkunas, 2005, p. 28). In view of earlier comments (see Kenyan novelist, N'gugi wa Thiong'o) and the historical examples of South Africa and Hong Kong, Narkunas' point is well made: it calls for reflection on how English, which is obtainable as a commodity with a price-tag, can function as a social mechanism or a device for personal commercial advancement – assuming of course, that it is affordable to the client. This point will be taken up again during the discussion of language and power in the following section.

If the spread of English had been initiated by colonialism, what are we to make of the prevalence and diffusion of the language in a post-colonial age, where many countries are democratized in some form and presumably exercise internal choice? An argument that is often advanced to explain the current prevalence and diffusion of English draws attention to the 'functional' characteristics of English, or what is also referred to as the 'neutrality' of the language. Kachru (cited in Tsuda, 2008, p. 48), a proponent of this stance, states the following:

> The language now belongs to those who use it as their first language, and to those who use it as an additional language, whether in its standard form or in its localized forms. The recognition of this functional diversity is so important.

And, in another example (cited by Pennycook, in Burns and Coffin, 2001, p. 79):

> English does have one clear advantage, attitudinally and linguistically: it has acquired a neutrality in a linguistic context where native languages, dialects, and styles sometimes have acquired undesirable connotations… It was originally the foreign (alien) ruler's language, but that drawback is often overshadowed by what it can do for its users. True, English is associated with a small and elite group; but it is in their role that the neutrality becomes vital.

The proponents of the functional argument, although acknowledging the imperialistic inheritance of English, have coined and furthered the concept of 'World Englishes', (Kachru, 1996, p. 135) which recognizes the adaptations and diversification that the language has undergone in its various locations across the world. Kachru's (cited in Bhatt, 2001, pp. 531-2) description of the functional uses of English in South Asia, for example, has been particularly helpful in doing justice to the socio-historical and political understandings of how the language has been absorbed in these societies. He describes this process of language absorption as follows: (a) instrumental – a medium of learning in education; (b) regulative – in administration and jurisprudence; (c) interpersonal – a link between speakers of mutually unintelligible languages or dialects in socio-linguistically plural societies, and as a language of elitism and modernization; and (d) imaginative – English in various literary genres.

The functionalist position has succeeded in widening the debates surrounding native versus non-native pronunciation, use and application, as well as establishing valid foundations for the equalization of different standards of English, thereby allowing the diversity of different locales and cultures to be absorbed into what is described as 'a family of Englishes'. In doing so, it has challenged the somewhat monolithic assessment (or 'homogenous entity', Bhatia, 2008, p. 268) of a native, 'standard' English which the antagonists of imperialism seem to imbue the argument with. Pennycook (in Burns and Coffin, 2001, p. 80) observes that the key issues in this approach, which forms the heart of the study of EIL, are questions of description, models, standards and intelligibility. Tsuda (2008, p. 48), however, in his assessment of this argument, calls this position 'ideological', as it 'simply affirms

the global spread of English without examining the impact of its dominance'. Significantly, he points out that the descriptive and objective methods prevalent in sociolinguistics glosses over the power structure that supported, and continues to maintain the global spread of English. Pennycook (in Burns and Coffin, 2001, p. 80) echoes this criticism by calling for a broader appreciation of the influences of social, historical, cultural and historical relationships in the study of EIL. He particularly questions the assumption that citizens and countries are somehow free from economic, political and ideological constraints that shape their course in history.

These underlying sets of circumstances are crucial to consider if one is to appreciate the reasons for alleged English hegemony today, since it offers the possibility of exposing the roots of language development in the context of historical events. As the earlier exposition of the growth and development of Afrikaans illustrated, the political, historical, economical and ideological influences in a society can hardly be separated from language. If the 'imperialist' roots of English partially account for the initial spread and proliferation of the language, and the functionalist paradigm provides a theory of the prevalence in use after colonialism, how is the current prevalence and ongoing spread of English, (often at the cost of the countries' indigenous languages) explained? And, in addition, why does it seem as if this status quo remains unchallenged? In an attempt to answer these questions, the final section of the paper now considers the links between language and power.

4. Language, power and its use(r)s

Thus far, this paper has presented a conception of language that is inseparable from its socio-historical, cultural, political and economic elements. Like the history of Afrikaans demonstrates, language constructs, and is likewise co-constructed by forces in society, which gain strength, or lose power in a constant interaction within the larger contexts of its speakers. Having highlighted the primarily social nature and function of language, the preceding discussion further introduced diverging points of view that first described the imperialist role of English, which left behind a 'linguistic habitus and the specific market conditions it created' (Bhatt, 2001, p. 533), resulting in what some writers refer to as the hegemony of English. It then moved to present some of the features that characterize the dominant paradigm of EIL today, namely functionalism.

Another glance at the presence of English in the world today (see Appendix 1) makes it quite clear that, in comparison to all the ex-colonial languages (French, Dutch, Portugese, even Spanish, which is still gaining speakers), English has by far excelled as a lingua franca. To argue that this is simply a legacy of colonialism does not fully explain or account for the current presence of EIL; alternatively, it might also lead to the conclusion that English is a unique or special language, and that its spread is somehow due to its inherent qualities as a language. To quote Crystal (cited in Tsuda, 2008, p. 47):

> No other language has spread around the world so extensively, but…what is impressive is not so much the grand total but the spread with which expansion has taken place since the 1950's. In 1950, the case for English as a world language would have been no more than plausible. Fifty years on, and the case is virtually unassailable… it proves impossible for any single group or alliance to stop its growth, or even influence its future.

To raise a response to the question of English's ongoing proliferation requires a slightly different approach, since, as was pointed out, colonialism and functionalism provide only a partial understanding for the continued spread and entrenchment of EIL. Before looking at a possible answer, another example from South Africa might again prove instructive. A seminal event in the eventual downfall of Apartheid, the Soweto uprising in 1976, had at its centre the resistance by black high school students against the language policy of a forced, dual-medium education (Afrikaans and English). Although mother tongue education until the age of thirteen was propagated and supported by the Apartheid regime, most black parents of affordable means sent their children to English-medium schools because they recognized the Apartheid government's intention of keeping them out of the main economic arena (Giliomee, 2009, pp. 5-7). Since South Africa's formal emergence as a fully democratic country in 1994, and the adoption of

eleven official languages, finally reflecting the full linguistic diversity of the country's citizens in law, the number of children receiving an education in English only has steadily increased, and across the different racial groupings. As was to be expected, Afrikaans has lost a significant number of schools and educational institutions, but the loss for the traditionally indigenous languages has been far greater – despite specified and protected language rights in the constitution (Giliomee, 2009, p. 9). These events provide some food for thought: what for instance, could explain the continuing and ever-increasing use of English on the one hand, and the 'linguicide' (Skuttnab-Kangas, 1996) of smaller languages on the other, despite their constitutional protection? Certainly, making language choices on behalf of their children's economic future is the prerogative of any parent, and these decisions therefore might explain their educational choices, but in a tragic twist, given the colonial and post-colonial (Apartheid) heritage of coercive language policies in South Africa, parents are choosing English *at the expense of* their mother tongue(s). If this tendency follows in the wake of linguistic democracy, it certainly begs for closer inspection.

If socio-political and historical factors provide both the fodder to feed, and the fuel to burn in the rise or demise of a language, it implies that such an emphasis cannot offer a fully satisfactory explanation for the growth and spread of a language beyond its geographical and intangible domains. What then explains the continued expansion of EIL? I would like to suggest that it requires a slightly deeper look at the role of language in terms of how it explains reality. Jordão (2009, p. 96) provides a particularly helpful insight, in what she refers to as the modern struggle for the 'semiotic control of reality', with language playing a three-fold role in that it: (1) names experience; (2) confer meaning on it; and, simultaneously, (3) construct our experiences. This implies that our experiences are shaped by this role in a reflexive meaning-building process, whereby the knowledge we produce is made possible and informed by the systems of meaning-production that are available to us. These features are certainly common to any of the world's languages, but this three-fold role of language in the construction of reality helps to explain why language plays such a profound role in the construction, legitimization and distribution of knowledge. This point brings to the fore what is pertinent, yet salient to the discussion of EIL: if the modern struggle is for a 'semiotic control of reality' as Jordão (2009) suggests, it implies that if *one* language (English) assumes this primary position (whether through free choice, careful social engineering, prioritizing economic interests, or flagrant coercion), it implies that it has been given a potentially decisive influence in the construction of knowledge.

From this vantage point, the arguments against an English hegemony makes good sense, since it is almost inconceivable to imagine our world with only one language. To draw such a conclusion might seem farcical, but it is not without precedent: English today is already recognized as a powerful 'gatekeeper' (Pennycook, 2008) in the global dispensation, and, as pointed out earlier (see Appendix 1), dominates in all the spheres that are involved in the creation, dissemination and maintenance of knowledge. To make it clear: in achieving such a degree of semiotic control, English is used as *the* modern signifier of choice (not, as history tells us, that this always was necessarily a 'free choice'). This semiotic control is evident in English's domination in areas that include academic writing, scientific discovery, technology, diplomacy, global news coverage, international trade, the Internet, international sports events, to name but a few of the important ones (also see Appendix 1). If seen in this light, and to return to our earlier question, the continued and expansive growth of English is then also to be partially explained by the fact that English has already *succeeded* in attaining a significant degree of semiotic control in the modern expression of reality.

If we accept this premise, it would help explain some of the questions related to the seemingly endless growth of the 'English language industry' (The British Council, 2014)[4]. For instance, it would explain why so many people, (and most parents) in so many countries, are inclined to include English as part of their (and their children's) learning. What this means is that in effect, the modern

[4] This page of the British Council's website is dedicated to the marketing of English. http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-faq-the-english-language-industry.htm

global citizen (but especially those that would like to be) has virtually no choice: by having no English, s/he stands to be economically less successful (see the Vietnamese example). To use the metaphor from N'gugi wa Thiong'o (2001) again: the holders of an English-language credit card will have access to global citizenship. The ones that do not might just find themselves becoming socio-politically disenfranchised, as the Kenyan example illustrated. Obtaining the English credit card can however be a double-edged sword. An example from Nigeria illustrates the socio-political legacy of a forced English language policy: '… an elite was created, which was nominally African, but in reality mesmerized by and beholden to Western culture… a ruling group was alienated linguistically and culturally from its roots' (Kwesi Kwaa Prah, cited in Giliomee, 2009, p. 6). These consequences are similar to those seen currently in South Africa, as described earlier (Giliomee, 2009). In considering language choices, it would therefore be sensible to continue questioning the assumption that citizens and countries are somehow free from economic, political and ideological constraints that shape their course in history (Pennycook, 2001); in fact, it is through language that these constraints operate. For countries in the outer- and expanding circles (Kachru, 1996) then, there arguably should always be a serious national discussion when it comes to decisions about language policy.

To summarize briefly, it appears that neither the hegemony of English (or its colonial legacy), nor the functional or utilitarian purpose of English can completely account for the ongoing spread and continued use of the language across the globe today. A more convincing explanation for the continued expansion of English seems to emerge through the application of the concept of 'semiotic control' (Jordão, 2009). In this understanding, the power/knowledge equation places language at the very core of the workings of society. Power, as Fairclough (2001, p. 3) reminds us, is not 'just a matter of language'; power exists in many other societal modalities and actually only becomes instrumental if enacted in some way. To understand the fear or opposition that might arise from the hegemony of English, it needs to be understood that, as Dendrinos et al. (2008, p. 3) explains, 'the problem is that (the opposition) vilifies the language itself rather than the structural conditions of its empowerment'. In other words, it is a case of shooting the messenger.

To take the matter out of academic discussion for a moment, where does it leave the individual – what about his/her choices and preferences? How can their position be understood? Aside from perhaps having a different home language, and perhaps having had possible access or exposure to another second language, the chances in the current global dispensation that a student will choose to study a second, and especially a third language other than English are becoming less and less likely. One immediate explanation for this contention, as the examples of Vietnam's and Hong Kong's educational policies demonstrated, is fairly straightforward: simple economic necessity. Another example might serve to extend the explanation. During his visit to the Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific (APU) campus, a Japanese university that is becoming well known for its effort at internationalization in Japan, the Japanese Prime Minister, in conversation with local and international students, commented on a student's language ability:

> I am surprised at your level of Japanese proficiency. Armed with your mother tongue, English and Japanese – languages of the Asia Pacific region – you're truly… a …global human resource. Language is used differently in different cultures, but by learning this through experience, as you have, will no doubt serve you well in the future out there in the business world (Ritsumeikan APU, 2013).

Two observations can be drawn from his comment: first is the Prime Minister's inclusion of English as a language of the Asia Pacific region, drawing attention to its geopolitical importance, despite it being a relative newcomer to a region that is known for its long history of linguistic diversity. Second is his pointing out that this student, through his command of three languages, has now become a 'global human resource', who will be 'served well in the future' by this ability in the 'business world'. This statement is by no means problematic: having multilingual skills is certainly a prized asset; yet, it needs to be pointed out that it is *only* English among these three languages that will provide this student with access to the global business world, i.e., outside of Asia: the English

credit card really can open doors. Reflecting back on the South African experience, it is even more striking that more than three centuries later, in an entirely different context and country, a mastery of English is again (still?) seen as a powerful ingredient for success in business and trade. Arguably, very little has changed in terms of the demands made on the individual and it is an open question whether the stakes are really any different. What is certain however is that the political interest in language continues unabatedly as powerful interests seek to expand their domains.

6. Conclusion

To conclude the discussion, it is perhaps useful to refer to again the dominance of EIL, given its prominence in so many educational domains across the world, in terms of its position as that of a 'gatekeeper' (Pennycook, 2008). Similar to how the policies of Anglicization, in the name of free trade and progress, disguised the British imperialist interest, the hidden tenets of *both* imperialism (through the legacy of colonialism) and functionalism in EIL continue to conceal the interests of power in the world today. As for the matter of individual freedom, the fact that powerful people are recognized and defined in the contemporary scene primarily in terms of economic success, implies that the fate of the haves and have-nots, and even more so, the never-to-haves, stands in danger of being determined by one language – English. This contention appears to be further supported by the notion that English has managed to achieve significant success in becoming a signifier of choice, i.e. it maintains a position of semiotic control in the world today.

If this conclusion appears somewhat fatalistic, there is also a more hopeful interpretation. Dendrinos et al. (2008, p. 1) observes, that it is an 'epistemological error' to assign to English, or any language for that matter, innate capabilities or characteristics, imperialist, hegemonic or neutral, or whatever our experience at the hands of the instruments of state or history has led us to believe. Just as power is realized through action, language becomes powerful by the use of those in power. And herein lies the hope: what a language is, or is not, therefore 'depends on all the historical and structural conditions for its use and maintenance' (Dendrinos et al, 2008, p. 1) as the South African example demonstrated. It further depends on the symbolic and cultural value attached to it by its users, and the economic, political and imaginative power of its users' (Dendrinos et al., p 10). These elements combine to create the meaning that the language ultimately reflects. Ascribing to a view that the English language dominates as a result of its inherent 'qualities' would therefore be a mistake: it implies a rather static view of both human and linguistic creativity. Rather, it is the institutionalization of these elements – such as language policy and its fixation on other societal structures to maintain the interests of a dominant group – that can evoke the hopelessness that those 'outside' the language fear. In this view language has no power; instead, its transformative power in the vast socio-cultural global domain remains firmly on the tongues of its users.

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Appendix 1: English in the world today (from: The British Council)

A. Concerning the speakers of English
▪ English has official or special status in at least seventy-five countries with a total population of over two billion speakers. ▪ English is spoken as a first language by around 375 million, and as a second language by around 375 million, speakers in the world. ▪ Speakers of English as a second language probably outnumber those who speak it as a first language. ▪ Around 750 million people are believed to speak English as a foreign language. ▪ One out of four of the world's population speaks English to some level of competence; demand from the other three-quarters is increasing.
B. Concerning the use of English
▪ English is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, diplomacy, sport, international competitions, pop music and advertising. ▪ Over two-thirds of the world's scientists read in English. ▪ Three quarters of the world's mail is written in English. ▪ 80% of the world's electronically stored information is in English. ▪ Of the estimated 200 million users of the Internet, some 36% communicate in English.
C. Concerning the study of English
▪ By the year 2000 it was estimated that over one billion people would be learning English. ▪ At any one time there are 130,000 students learning English and other skills through the medium of English in British Council teaching centers worldwide. ▪ Around 700,000 people go to learn English in the UK each year.
D. Concerning the economic benefits of English
▪ British English language products are worth over 800 million pounds a year to the UK. ▪ The total expenditure of the 700,000 visitors to the UK annually to learn English is over 700 million pounds - possibly over one billion pounds. ▪ The English language makes it possible for British companies to develop markets, sell into them and form commercial alliances; it brings direct benefits through the supply of English teaching goods and services.